

This position statement is a response to the growing concern for arts in education and ASCD's commitment to a balanced curriculum. The paper was requested by a resolution passed at the 1976 Miami business meeting. This request was reaffirmed by the Executive Council in June 1976. Dr. Speiker was charged with the responsibility of carrying out the council request.

Pressures on the educational process in America have developed in the past few years from different directions. Some are concerned with development and evaluation of objectives, others dwindling financial resources, others a perceived weakness in areas of knowledge considered basic, and still others with a viable balance of knowledge areas within the curriculum. All have expressed strong stances concerning the arts in education, either in rationale, curriculum, or evaluation. Due to various factors, many of these statements have been devoted to the arts rather than to the broader question of aesthetics in American education. ASCD in this statement will take a broader view of the situation, and will deal with the question of aesthetics, which will be defined as dealing with the nature of the beautiful and with judgments concerning beauty. *Such a definition encourages a concern for an entire curriculum rather than a relatively narrowly defined area of the arts as separate or correlated disciplines.*

This statement will contain a brief historical view of aesthetics in education throughout the history of mankind with particular emphasis upon recent ideas expressed concerning American schools; current theories of psychology and learning as they pertain to aesthetic education; current trends and developments in the field; a rationale for the inclusion of aesthetics as an integral part of a balanced curriculum; and finally a series of recommendations to influential members of the educational community that emphasize and attempt to increase the importance of aesthetics in American schools.

History of Arts Education

Art in its various forms has assumed an important role in the lives of human beings since the advent of humankind as a civilized being. Earlier evidences on cave walls would seem to indicate that people have always seen the creation

Aesthetics in American Education: A Position Statement

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of beauty as an important aspect of life. Whether along the Hwang-Ho, Indus, or Nile rivers, all early civilizations are noted more for artifacts in arts areas than in any other related area. In Athens, music was considered to be one of the basic subjects that every citizen should know.

Except for the brief period during the Golden Age of Athens and continuing up to relatively recent time, most of the arts were taught as apprenticeships. Several students would learn in a continually more sophisticated way the art of the master. Art was a "doing" type of knowledge, many times relating to skills and innate abilities to perceptualize rather than to any formal type of schooling. When the Massachusetts Normal Art School was established in 1871, the emphasis on art was a series of copied exercises based upon what artists did. The nature of art was considered to be the framework for art education. Children were considered simply untrained in the proper skills. Thus, the emphasis was on the few and their development as talented artists. If it became evident that insufficient talent or motivation was present, students were simply encouraged to cease their efforts.

It was not until the work of Froebel that sensory learning was considered to be equal in importance to book learning for early childhood. During this time, increasing emphasis was given to the nature of the child and the accompanying developmental characteristics. Creativity in art

began to be encouraged. The finished product was considered less upon disciplined lines and more in terms of perceptual development. It took into account the age and physiological development of the individual participating in the art activity.

Much of current knowledge of art was based upon the philosophical premises posited by John Dewey and other progressive educational philosophers. The work of such art theorists as Langer, Lowenfeld, and Read was also influential. Their theories generally aimed in the direction of relativism. Relativists maintained that perception was the primary key. Aesthetic experience was the result of transactions between a work of art and a viewer. Since no two persons perceive identically, the worth of a work of art would be uttered as a relative value statement.

Current Theories in Aesthetic Education

Following the philosophy of Dewey and others in the twentieth century, aesthetic education is viewed as perceptual in nature. It is dependent on the senses for its acquisition. Since each individual perceives depending on idiosyncratic sensual development, a systematized set of criteria for excellence is much more difficult to achieve in this area than in others where agreement on solutions is more readily achieved. In general, a consensus arrived at by a group of experts (connoisseurs) in the area is the most widely accepted standard of excellence. The determination of the extent to which those criteria have been met is a subjective judgment achieved after the fact. This "post hoc" type of evaluation is more valid for aesthetic development than other types of evaluation and is generally accepted by most aestheticians. The objective evaluation debate, which has created much sound and fury but little light, would seem to be placed in its proper context when it is seen as irrelevant to perceptual sensitivity that can be measured only in terms of "post hoc" evaluative devices.

In the final analysis, the development of inquiry, creativity, and divergence would all seem to depend on induction. To some extent this negates the behavioristic theory of going from step to step in a linear fashion. If, in the process of inquiry, ten different correct solutions are found, some of which are not preconceived and by their nature cannot be, then a post hoc type of

evaluation and educational improvement must be developed. Then, aesthetic education becomes important due to its emphasis upon perception, phenomenistic developmental growth, and its emphasis on pluralistic responses and "post hoc" measurement.

Current Trends in Aesthetic Education

The present situation in aesthetic education is ambivalent to say the least. Quality of artists and demand for them within the community context seems to be at an all time high. Seldom, if ever, in the history of humanity have the arts played so important a role in the culture of a civilization. The following statistics would seem to indicate a tremendous burgeoning of the arts in the United States:

- A recent estimate of seven hundred million visits to museums
- More people reported attending cultural events than sport events
- Adult education classes in the arts increasing geometrically in some areas of the nation each year
- Parents becoming involved in collective bargaining due to an absence of art or music in schools.

Some of these same people are suggesting increases in arts in the public schools. A recent Harris Poll indicated that 69 to 86 percent of those polled in California favored the teaching of arts courses for credit as an integral part of the curriculum. At the same time, in California the number of school district art supervisors was reported to have dropped in a six-year period from 408 people to 115 people. How can this situation be explained? Is either one or the other statistic invalid or unreliable in its indications concerning the view of art in education?

Retrenchment has become an ominous specter in the existence of arts education in the United States. In many parts of the country, concern for diminution of taxation and decreasing enrollments has brought about situations in individual schools in which all areas of the curriculum are drawing a critical eye. Uncertainty as to the objectives of aesthetic education and of means for evaluating their achievement has created a situation in which they can be viewed with a jaundiced eye. Recent

standardized test results have created situations in which those areas in which progress can be most easily and effectively measured may receive greatest support. A swing, even if temporary, away from humanistic education and toward a "back-to-basics" framework leads to still further difficulties in aesthetic education.

Another recent, more favorable trend is the establishment of several funding organizations that have as one of their major purposes a development of aesthetic perceptions in the schools and

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community. A quick review of these organizations will indicate that both financial and exhortative support is forthcoming from almost all governmental levels.

1. Alliance for Arts Education (administered by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington): attempting to amalgamate new partnerships between art and education at state and local levels.

2. Study of Schooling in the United States (/I/D/E/A): conducting a study on the arts in education.

3. American Council for the Arts in Education: preparing a paper on the problems and prospects for the arts in education.

4. National Endowment for the Arts: financing and aiding in planning with state and local arts councils.

5. School systems aided by ESEA: developing alliances with art organizations and utilizing Artists in Schools.

6. Rockefeller Foundation: financing and aiding the development of arts education leadership programs for administrators and supervisors.

7. J.D.R. 3rd Fund: coordinating activities of the Ad Hoc Coalition of States for the Arts in Education.

ASCD has conducted research in the area of

state and local aesthetic education under a grant from the American Council for the Arts in Education. This research seemed to support the premise that arts education was holding its own in curriculum, but that increasing emphasis upon its importance must be given to prevent deterioration.

Thus, the picture of aesthetics in the schools would seem to be extremely complex. Faced with seeming demands from the community for adult arts activities and support for school activities on the one hand and with financial exigencies and increasing demand for time on behalf of the basic skills on the other, the situation would seem to be open to strife and debate. Under these circumstances it would seem essential that the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development should take a position that would be made known to appropriate organizations throughout the United States.

Rationale for Aesthetic Education

We in ASCD believe that education has many differing and complementary major purposes. Debate has continued from the inception of the educative process concerning which of these purposes should gain or retain precedence. While many purposes might be mentioned, for the sake of brevity in this statement only six will be stressed. These are:

1. Quality of Life
2. Humanity (those knowledges and attitudes that make humaneness)
3. Cultural Pluralism (an acceptance of the many complementary aspects of American culture)
4. Citizenship
5. General Education (those knowledges needed in order to live in our society)
6. Personal Satisfaction.

It is a fundamental assumption that a viable *quality of life* is essential to the life force of the human individual. This quality is an open-ended goal. A person may always strive for a quality just slightly better than that presently attained. Whether this quality is defined in terms of work, pleasure, or ecology, there is a tradition that has long been and will continue to be honored in American education. Certainly no such goal could

be validly considered without great attention to aesthetics and their contribution to this quality of life.

Humanity as a goal of the educational establishment has long been accepted. To consider such humanity without its expression in the various arts would be shortsighted. Throughout history, people have proclaimed their innate humanity through music, art, dance, and others.

In the area of *cultural pluralism*, aesthetic education can serve one of its primary functions. In no other discipline of learning can the culture of the oriental, the native American, the Hispanic-speaking person be so clearly understood. Here, as in no other area, it is possible for individuals to express the importance of their culture and its contribution to the larger American culture.

Citizenship can be learned in many ways. However, the ease with which it can be fostered through dramatics and music is easily exemplified. The satisfaction and pride in nation and ethnicity available from these forms of the arts can be evidenced to a great extent in their utilization through all cultures.

Uncertainty as to what constitutes *general education* for all creates a continuous debate. However, to deny the place of music, dance, art, and dramatics in the school day experiences of any individual would seem to belie the expressed intent of educational theorists, practical educators, and the patrons of the schools.

Finally, the *personal satisfaction* that can be derived by individuals in the learning process when involved with aesthetic education would seem to justify its place in the curriculum as a means of motivation even if one were to negate its worth as a separate subject area. Whether the particular arts discipline is being expressed in sophisticated, serious ways or in light-hearted, popular ways is not the issue at hand, if one considers the purpose to be individual personal satisfaction where "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

If these six major purposes for education, which are particularly appropriate for consideration in terms of aesthetic education, are to be most effectively met, the educative process must be a lifelong matter. A coordination between pre-school, elementary school, secondary school, higher education, and continuing education must

be organized. Culture cannot be segmented according to age. Rather, it must be an ongoing sequential system based upon the idiosyncratic needs, desires, and purposes of the various individuals participating in the activity. Experiences in this sequential systematic approach to aesthetic education throughout the years must be based upon four purposes. These have best been articulated by the California State Board of Education in the California Framework for Art Education, which was intended as a guide for curriculum development. According to this statement, the

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four basic components in all art programs, and by extension in our view to all life, are: experiences to develop perceptual skills, art activities to develop expressive skills, classroom activities to understand our cultural heritage, and developing abilities for making aesthetic judgments.

The infusion of the arts in the general curriculum can only increase the depth of aesthetic experiences available to the individual learner. To argue that aesthetics do not exist throughout the curriculum would be shortsighted; and to maintain that an aesthetic appreciation can be developed without the inclusion of the arts would be erroneous. The question of means for achieving the infusion of the arts in the general curriculum, whether in separate disciplines, an interdisciplinary context, or a completely integrated and highly fused approach is one which is even now being considered by several learned bodies. For example, the ad hoc Committee on Arts in General Education is receiving financial aid from the J.D.R. 3rd Fund to determine how best to accomplish this infusion of the arts. While means may be debated, the final product of aesthetic education in the public schools cannot be debated. Aesthetic education must be and will be an essential and fundamental part of the experiences of individuals throughout their educative experience which, in the next several decades, can be assumed to be

their entire life. Without such commitment, the quality of life in the United States will suffer. With such a commitment, we may assume an onward progress that will assure a greater pleasure and accomplishment in the United States.

Recommendations for Aesthetics in American Education

Due to the concern for the role of aesthetic education in America expressed in the paragraphs earlier, we, representing the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, recom-

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mend several actions to school boards and administrators in order to achieve the most effective utilization of aesthetic knowledges, skills, and sensibilities in the total education of those members of the community for whom schools are responsible. We recognize that some of these recommendations are being accomplished at many schools, and some of them are still visionary. The administrator of each school district will need to implement these recommendations in light of the unique situation present within the current framework.

Recommendations

1. Aesthetics should be accorded a significant place in the basic education at all levels of learning of all individuals in the nation. To accomplish this purpose, schools should:

a. Emphasize the cultural heritage of humankind with special notice given to the aesthetic strivings of individuals and their contributions to the cultures to which they belong. Heterogeneity of cultural backgrounds as it molds current cultural pluralism should be accented.

b. Present opportunities for individuals to develop expressive skills in various art activities for the improvement of idiosyncratic paths toward a better quality of life. Emphasis on expression

and individual responsiveness and development should hold priority over rigorous attempts toward following a preconceived model.

c. Assist individuals in the development of a critical attitude toward the creation of art. Every person should be academically equipped to the greatest possible extent as a connoisseur so that insights toward sophistication as a consumer of beauty could be an expected result of educational experiences.

d. Furnish multitudinous and varied experiences in arts activities for the development of perceptual skills to the greatest possible extent within each student. Irrespective of the breadth or depth of artistic skill, every individual should be able to appreciate beauty both in the abstract and pragmatic modes.

2. Schools should be organized both in facilities and scheduling to facilitate the most effective achievement of the curricular goals outlined earlier. In order to accomplish this organization with real and concerted assistance from teachers and the community, the school administrator should:

a. Arrange school facilities in such a manner as to enhance a sense of an appreciation for sensual beauty throughout the educational environment. Paintings, sculpture, other visual arts, and music should permeate the school day. Opportunities for physical activities as in dance and drama should become an integral aspect of the pupil's daily experience.

b. Foster the integration of the arts into the general education of every pupil. Every teacher should be aware of and inculcate the values inherent in the arts within his/her subject matter.

c. Encourage the development of interdisciplinary humanities teams (language arts, social studies, music, and art) in the upper grades (6-12). Fundamental concepts of the unity in diversity framework in past and present cultures may best be presented when a holistic view of topics is presented.

d. Develop an interdisciplinary arts program throughout the school system in order to foster aesthetic perceptions in a more efficacious manner. Individual teachers in the lower grades should be encouraged to achieve competence in more than one art area to facilitate such a program.

3. Teachers serve the most important function in the aesthetic education process both in their teaching ability and in their artistic stances as observers and performers. In order to create the most beneficial impact for aesthetics upon learners in school, teachers should:

a. Be totally committed to the concept of aesthetics as a critical part of the total school learning program. All teachers should perceive and implement aesthetic objectives throughout the school experience.

b. Be aware of and prepared to teach in at least two areas of arts education. Emphasis must be increased on dance and drama in the preparation of all teachers (particularly elementary) in order to facilitate this recommendation.

c. Continue and enhance performing and critical skills in aesthetic areas. Teachers should be expected to perform at a level sufficient to serve as a model for even the most talented pupils. Continuing performance and/or criticism should be expected.

d. Participate in in-service developmental activities. Aesthetic talents tend to atrophy with insufficient attention. Continuous practice and growth should be a trademark for teachers stressing senses and perceptions.

4. Aesthetic education should be a continuing lifetime activity. The school and community should cooperate in facilitating such activity. In order to develop such a working relationship with the community, school boards and/or school administrators should:

a. Coordinate programs and correlate purposes so that aesthetic experiences would be available to all members of the community, both school age and older. Facilities, personnel, teachers, and pupils should be available to members of the community and vice versa. Such special attention should provide for increased visibility of the continuing nature of aesthetic activities.

b. Develop a system in which guest artists and lecturers and aesthetic stimuli ordinarily not found in school could be introduced as a normal and regular aspect of the school program.

c. Establish systematic arrangements for teachers to contribute both in instruction and per-

Research in Review Manuscripts Wanted

Manuscripts are being solicited for this year's "Research in Review" column. Manuscripts should be 6-7 pages in length including bibliography, typed double-spaced.

Manuscripts should be a review of the literature (research) on a particular topic or area of interest. Themes for this year's issues are:

Dec.: "Near Futures Imperatives — If . . . Then"

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Feb.: "State/Federal Role in Curriculum Development"

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formance to the aesthetic development of the community as a basic function of their position. Pupil activities should be focused toward a broader community-based audience. 



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